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update

Published by the Division of Public Affairs
United Nations Development Programme
One UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017

Vol. 7, no. 24, 5 December 1994

Rwanda refugee crisis threatens environmental disaster

Beyond the human crisis of the flood of Rwandan refugees pouring into neighbouring countries, an environmental crisis is unfolding that threatens the ecological balance of the region. A recent UNDP-commissioned report reveals that the environmental impact of the Rwandan refugees in Zaire is significantly more critical than the Zairean government and the multilateral and bilateral agencies first realized.

The environmental problems are especially severe in the Virunga National Park, a World Heritage Site which is rich in rare species of mammals and birds. Most of the nearly half a million refugees, living in five nearby camps, are within walking distance of the park. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, at least 30,000 refugees forage in the

Continued on page 2

B. Press/UNHCR

P. Mountis/UNHCR

Above: Refugees at Kibumba camp waiting for water to be distributed from a tanker. Left: More than a million Rwandan refugees fled to Zaire.

In this issue:

UNDP and World Conservation Union sign Partnership Agreement — Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the year 2005 adopted at regional conference

UN Secretary-General releases "Agenda for Development"

United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali announced his new Agenda for Development, a series of recommendations calling for such initiatives as the creation of a new council of international development advisers, a world hearing on disarmament and development, and the cancellation of debts owed by the poorest countries. The 19-page "Agenda for Development", issued on 14 November, also calls for the UN General Assembly to consider a proposal for an international conference on the financing of development.

The report states that a "new framework for international cooperation" is needed to incorporate the "emerging consensus on the priority and dimensions of development." It adds that the United Nations "cannot be a strong force for peace unless it is a strong force for development." It calls for the various parts of the UN system to "integrate their complementary mandates into coherent and coordinated support" of national efforts.

The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) would be "an international development assistance review committee" functioning as a "unifying governing entity to which the existing governing bodies of the UN funds and programmes would relate on major policy matters." ECOSOC would "provide inter-governmental oversight of the relevant UN departments with responsibilities for operational activities for development."

Continued on page 2

Rwanda, *continued*

park every day, emerging with loads of wood, each averaging 40 pounds. While the wood was initially used only for fuel and to build shelters, it has become a significant source of income, especially among Rwandan soldiers.

The environmental crisis is exacerbated by the disposal of human, solid and medical waste in and around the camps, according to the UNDP report. Medical waste that is dumped in the Virunga Park is being scattered by animals in their search for food. There is thus the potential for spreading diseases from rubbish heaps to humans as well as to the park's wildlife.

In immediate response to the alarming report, and acting on a direct appeal from the President of the Zaire Nature Conservation Institute, UNDP collaborated with the Chief Executive Officer of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to obtain the release of $250,000 for emergency actions to mitigate the threats to the biodiversity of the Virunga National Park in eastern Zaire. The GEF is a funding mechanism designed to address global environmental problems, including protection of biodiversity.

In addition, UNDP arranged a briefing with officials from relief agencies and international conservation NGOs which are active in the region. The briefing, held in New York on 17 November, centred on the immediate emergency actions to be taken in the context of the GEF support. Pre-emptive activities to mitigate some of the destruction could reduce the magnitude of the rehabilitation and restoration required later. It could also serve to mobilize support from other donors to assist in addressing some of the environmental aspects of the crisis.

"Agenda for Development"*, continued*

On the topic of the UN's relations with the World Bank, the report states there "are many fields in which the ongoing dialogue and substantive partnerships" can be strengthened. One area could be that of World Bank lending for social, environmental and other sectors, "which require capacity building, decentralized planning and execution, small loans and more participatory development involving all institutions of civil society."

To improve the work of the UN system in support of development, the report calls for improved coordination in the delivery of assistance, and strengthening the Resident Coordinator and "country-driven approaches." To accomplish these and other goals, "the Secretary-General will convene frequent meetings of all senior officials in the economic and social sectors with the support of the Administrator of UNDP."

The Secretary-General circulated his "An Agenda for Development" on 6 May, and it was discussed in the UN General Assembly in June. The report identified five dimensions of development: peace, the economy, environmental protection, justice and democracy. The debate resulted in a resolution calling for recommendations on UN actions to implement the Secretary-General's vision. These were the "recommendations" issued on 14 November.

UNDP and World Conservation Union sign Partnership Agreement

An agreement signed in New York on 15 November by the heads of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and IUCN — The World Conservation Union — will strengthen collaboration between the two organizations and help promote biodiversity conservation and capacity-building worldwide. IUCN is the world's largest grouping of conservation and environmental professionals.

Special emphasis will be placed on the need to find workable approaches to implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity at national levels — to move "from theory to practicalities" as IUCN Director General, David McDowell, described it.

UNDP Administrator James Gustave Speth said that "IUCN and UNDP have cooperated over the years on a number of activities, including National Conservation Strategies, the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme, and the Global Biodiversity Forum, to name just a few. We will work to strengthen true cooperation in a wide range of areas, and UNDP has introduced mechanisms to encourage such innovative partnerships".

UNDP and IUCN both believe that their missions can be reinforced by the development and implementation of the partnership between the two institutions. IUCN Director General Mr. McDowell noted: "IUCN, its members and Commissions have played a leading role in putting biodiversity concerns on the global agenda and the Union's expert networks are a vital resource in this area." Biodiversity has also been highlighted as one of UNDP's priorities as well as being a priority within the Global Environment Facility, for which UNDP is a co-implementing agency.

The agreement identifies a range of areas for closer IUCN/UNDP collaboration, including strategic planning for sustainable development, environmental law and policy, and building human and institutional capacities at both national and global levels in support of biodiversity conservation.

The first phase of the partnership —

covering calendar year 1995 — includes a schedule of specific initiatives. IUCN will carry out two of six national pilot studies on strategic planning being undertaken by UNDP to submit to the Commission on Sustainable Development (the Rio "Earth Summit" follow-up body). UNDP and IUCN will collaborate to develop a full pilot programme for environmental law in an African country. IUCN will also act as the principal adviser to a selected UNDP office to support the local development of national biodiversity strategies.

Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the year 2005 adopted at regional conference

The right to employment and economic participation, coping with the effects of wars and armed conflict, ending violence against women and meeting the special needs of youth were some of the goals proposed at the Arab regional preparatory conference for the Fourth World Conference on Women. More than 400 participants from 17 countries in the region met in Amman, Jordan from 8-10 November, under the aegis of Her Royal Highness Princess Basma Bin Talal of Jordan. The result was the formulation of the "Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005".

The Plan of Action urges the Arab governments to establish policies quickly and to take actions to meet the urgent needs of Arab women. "These include legal rights, promoting awareness, education, literacy and rehabilitation, job promotion and the alleviation of poverty and the provision of health, medical and psychological counselling services," says the Plan.

Despite the notable progress made by Arab women in gaining access to education, health services and employment in the last decade, the number of poor women is on the rise, according to the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). At the same time, there has been limited progress in enforcing legislation designed to protect the rights of women. Women's participation in decision-making is restricted and the domestic and agricultural work of women is neither properly renumerated nor included in the Gross National Product. ESCWA co-organised the meeting with the League of Arab States and the Tunis-based Centre for Arab Women's Training and Research.

The inter-governmental meeting was preceded by a three-day NGO Forum. Nearly 900 Arab women participated in 30 workshops.

"The huge turn-out and the active debates prove how much interest there is throughout the region in the advancement of women. This is also shown by the participants' ability to reach consensus on a wide range of issues," said Osman Hashim, UN Resident Coordinator and Resident Representative of UNDP in Jordan.

UNDP used the occasion of the regional preparatory meeting for a press launch of its report, "At the Crossroads: Challenges and Choices for Palestinian Women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip." "We want to see a society in the building of which men and women participate together. The future is involved. This is a crossroad, a starting point, and everyone is needed," said Mr. Hashim.

UNDP also hosted a workshop on the value of women's work, inviting participants to share studies and papers for use in compiling the 1995 "Human Development Report." "UNDP can make a significant contribution to the follow-up of the Plan of Action," Mr. Hashim said. "At the country level, we can work with governments to select priorities, set and cost targets in terms of human and material resources, and define mechanisms for implementation and monitoring. This sort of specific target-setting is crucial to translating the plan from regional aspirations to country reality. This can

WHO / Koundakjian

The Arab Plan of Action urges the promotion of health care for women.

be UNDP's contribution to Beijing, and not just in the Arab region". The Fourth World Conference on Women will be held in Beijing, China on 4-15 September, 1995.

Approved projects:

(all projects subject to modification; sums quoted in US dollars)

Indonesia and Malaysia — Conservation Strategy for Rhinoceros of South East Asia — Only about 11,000 - 12,000 rhinos exist on earth in the wild. Two species in particular — Dicerorhinus sumatrensis and Rhinoceros sondalcus — are in extreme danger of extinction. This Global Environment Facility project will concentrate on the short-term crisis to ensure that the rhinoceros will survive over the next 3-5 years, and that the groundwork will be set for longer-term actions.

This project will support the creation and training of Rhino Protection Units in the two countries. It will help to strengthen conservation agencies, and develop means for involving local communities in rhino conservation. In addition, a comprehensive funding plan and long-term strategies for rhino conservation will be developed.

UNDP contribution through the Global Environment Facility: $2,000,000. UNDP support will be used for the institutional and technical foundation needed to carry out rhino conservation strategies in both countries. Funds will be used for training, experts, logistical support and workshops. Executed by the UNDP/Office for Project Services in association with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, and the Species Survival Commission. The lead government authority for Indonesia is the Directorate of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation. In Malaysia, the lead government authority is the Department of Wildlife and National Parks. (RAS/93/G31)

Editor: Cherie Hart
Tel: (212) 906 5304
Fax: (212) 906 5364

Printed on recycled paper

United Nations Development Programme
One United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017

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